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RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY REPORT - ITEM 3(b)

(Mr. J.D.N. Versluys)

CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS AND FORMS OF CULTURAL ENJOYMENT

It was felt that the subject was actually too large to be dealt with satisfactorily in the little time available. The points raised could be mentioned only without going deeper into the problems.

It was pointed out that traditional art was utilitarian and that art for its own sake did not exist. The words "artisan" and "artist" still show the original situation when tools and utensils were made by a craftsman who often was an artist. In some places this same combination is still to be found, e.g. weavers of beautifully coloured though coarse Timor cloth (Indonesia), or of the finest silk sarees in Banaras (India).

/ What is

What is the influence of modern articles mechanically produced in masses on those hand made articles? In many cases it is found that the mass produced articles become very popular, not only because they are cheap, but also because of the glamourous colours and smooth finish. Those are features which in many cases cannot be achieved by indigenous techniques, and are therefore attractive. It is interesting to note that the weavers in Timor like to add a few machine made trends of hard green or purple yarn to their hand spun and hand woven cloths the yarn of which is normally coloured by themselves with dyes made out of certain roots and leaves. This may not seem an improvement to the Western observer who admires the beautiful pattern and wonderful colour combination of the cloth made with purely indigenous material.

When two cultures come into contact some acculturation always takes place. It will depend on their relative strength what the result will be. If the new culture is strong the old one may seem to disappear altogether although some trends of the original culture will practically always be visible. It is also possible that the new culture has only very little impact and is influenced by the original culture. Or these may be an appreciable mutual influences. An interesting remark of the last situation may be found in Bali (Indonesia) where the Balinese sculptors and painters have adopted features of modern Western art whereas they, in their turn, had a strong influence on the Western artists living in Bali.

When we speak of acculturation we usually think of Western influence on Eastern culture. However, it is very probable that there will be an increasing influence of one Asian culture affecting another. This is a new development, as the cultural contacts used to be nearly exclusively with Western countries.

A conscious effort to a blending of cultures was made by Tagore in the first part of this century. Eastern and Western motives were used together and it was tried to attain a higher unity by doing so. Even now a number of Indian painters make such an endeavour. The problem really is to express themselves and their admiration for Indian culture at the same time.

/For Asian

For Asian painters the problem is harder than the other artists, because they have been trained mostly in a Western culture which may easily result in a feeling of standing between two cultures and lack of belonging.

It is understandable that in a period of acculturation confusion of values will easily occur. But it is most probable that really strong cultural values, although perhaps influenced by foreign culture, will largely remain the same. The Indian delegate mentioned the strong position of his culture which had not been deeply affected by foreign influences. Indian music and dancing are highly developed and warmly appreciated by the Indian public. In Viet-Nam the position both of the traditional and the so-called reformed music is also very strong. The same holds true for Indonesia although these music and dance performances as well as those of the wajang[1] have become much shorter. The well-known Javanese batiks regularly show new patterns and adopt themselves to changes in taste.

A special place is taken by Ayurvedic and Unani medicine in the Indian sub-continent. Although Western medicine has supplanted these forms of medicine, at least to a large extent in towns and cities, they are still very vital in the country side. In fact, homeopathy was known in India long before Hahnemouni propagated it in the West, and some features of these medical arts might be usefully adopted by Western medicine, the Indian delegate believed.

It is understandable that most governments try to preserve traditional arts and, at the same time, to propagate the use of articles produced by handicrafts. Diversity of cultures is one of the riches of mankind, and it would be a gloom prospect if we had to live in a one-culture world. However, if the traditional arts and crafts have no force to maintain themselves, they cannot be saved either by government help. On the other hand, it has been proved in many cases that a craft which seemed doomed could be revitalized by suitable assistance and propaganda. The post-war boom in Thai silk which has now a good export market to the United States of America, is a clear example. Government help in the sales of handicraft products has also been

/valuable for

1/ There are different kinds of wajang; the three most important ones are the wajang Kulit (puppet theatre with leather puppets whose shadows play on a screen), wajang golèk (puppet theatre) and wajang wong (drama in which actors perform).

valuable for the maintenance of a group of craftsmen who would otherwise have been out of work. Nevertheless, it seems that handicrafts will only have a lasting place in the economy of a country when they produce really well made, artistic products with which the machine cannot compete.

The influence of the city is probably most vividly visible in the mass recreation, especially the cinema. It was reported from practically all the countries of Asia that the cinema enjoyed an even increasing popularity. But it was also generally recognized that the films shown left very much to be desired. Imported films were generally of a low cultural level, but the indigenous films were no better. India with a very important production of films (third in the world) and exporting films to a number of countries in Asia, has not yet succeeded in reaching a culturally acceptable level. The same complaint came from Japan where foreign films were only popular in the towns and not in the country side where exclusively Japanese films were shown.

The position of the indigenous arts serving mass recreation is different, as music and drama are generally of a better level than films, but deterioration of music, especially film music, is also noted.

New forms of recreation like sports, particularly football, have become very popular in various Asian countries. But indigenous sports can still hold their own.

Relatively novel forms of recreation like visiting museums and public libraries are still largely limited to the cities, although there are a number of village reading rooms and a few library services which reach remote villages by sending books in iron trunks from one place to another. There is a very great demand for reading matter. The example of the Delhi Public Library, mentioned in paper URB/4 shows that there is a nearly unlimited hunger for books. And it is interesting to note that museums which do not charge on admission fee can always be sure of numerous visitors. This ought to bring about some change in the organization of museums which are still largely catering for the intellectural elite. By giving more and more simple explanations in the vernaculum it should be tried to bring the objects shown nearer to the public.

It is a general trend it may be expected that the countries of Asia will have to follow the example of the West, namely, more and more commercialized recreation, with a decrease in participants and an increase in spectators.